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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT  
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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3762  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1580  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1447  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2016  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MOSQUE-HOPPING IN ASHGABAT FINDS NO TRACE  
OF THE RUHNAMA

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0601

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0566

[1](#)C. ASHGABAT 0557

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: PolOff's visit to various Ashgabat mosques revealed the conspicuous absence of the Ruhnama, former President Niyazov's required "spiritual guide," underscoring the book's decline in influence in post-Niyazov Turkmenistan. Considering that under Niyazov it was compulsory for all mosques to display the Ruhnama, its absence emphasizes the degree to which traces of the Ruhnama -- and former President Niyazov's cult of personality -- have gradually disappeared in Berdimuhamedov's Turkmenistan. END SUMMARY.

MOSQUE-HOPPING IN ASHGABAT: NO TRACE OF THE RUHNAMA

[1](#)3. (SBU) PolOff visited several mosques around Ashgabat on May 12. A couple of the mosques had bookshelves with copies of the Qur'an for the use of visitors, but PolOff found no trace of the Ruhnama in any of them. After finding the first mosque he visited completely deserted, PolOff next tried the Hezrety Omar Mosque, close to the city center. When he arrived, at least 25-30 men (no women) were leaving the mosque, the main prayer space of which was located up a flight of stairs on the second floor. The central two-thirds of the space appeared to be reserved for men, while the remainder was partitioned off, presumably for the use of women. According to a notice posted in the back, prayer had started at 1:30 pm and was just getting out, although five or six men were still silently finishing their prayers. PolOff asked a young man who was just arriving whether this was a Shia or Sunni mosque. At first he did not seem to understand the question, but then said that both Sunni and Shia pray here together.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The third mosque PolOff visited was the Azady Mosque, founded in 1993, which local Embassy employees characterized as an "unofficial" mosque - that is, not registered with the government. According to a posted sign, prayer had begun at 2:00 pm, meaning that once again PolOff arrived when almost everybody had already left. The front of the mosque featured several large posters of

Mecca, and there was a balcony in the back, presumably for the use of women.

15. (SBU) Finally, PolOff attempted to find a fourth mosque by giving directions to a taxi driver, but ended up getting dropped off instead in a residential neighborhood in front of a small and unobtrusive "house mosque" that literally appeared to be nothing more than a tiny white house with a green dome on top. A sign in Arabic and Turkmen identified it as the "Hoja Ahmad Yasavi Mosque" - the name of a famous 12th-century Sufi saint who lived in what is today southern Kazakhstan - meaning the mosque was almost certainly Sunni, not Shia. Several men were busily working on the exterior, painting the front and repairing the roof, suggesting that the mosque is actively used. PolOff attempted to engage one of the young men painting out front in conversation, but the man spoke only broken Russian. PolOff asked him if he attended the mosque, and he said he did, but offered little more.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: PolOff's visits to the mosques were spontaneous, with no advance warning. The disappearance of the Ruhnama from mosque bookshelves is a major development over the past year. Considering that under Niyazov it was compulsory for all mosques to display the Ruhnama, its absence underscores the degree to which traces of the Ruhnama -- and former President Niyazov's cult of personality -- have gradually disappeared in Berdimuhamedov's Turkmenistan. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND